

Remarks at a White House Coronavirus Task Force Press Briefing
March 9, 2020

The President. Thank you very much. We just attended a very important Task Force meeting on the virus that everybody is talking about all over the world. No matter where you go, that's what's on people's minds. And we are going to take care of, and have been taking care of, the American public and the American economy.

We are going to be asking tomorrow—we're seeing the Senate. We're going to be meeting with House Republicans, Mitch McConnell, everybody, and discussing a possible payroll tax cut or relief, substantial relief—very substantial relief. That's a big number.

We're also going to be talking about hourly wage earners getting help so that they can be in a position where they're not going to ever miss a paycheck. We're going to be working with companies and small companies, large companies—a lot of companies—so that they don't get penalized for something that's not their fault. It's not their fault; it's not our country's fault.

This was something that we were thrown into, and we're going to handle it, and we have been handling it very well. The big decision was early when we shut down our borders. We're the first ones ever to do that. We've never done that in our country before. Or we'd have a situation that would be a lot more dire.

Also, we're going to be seeing Small Business Administration and creating loans for small businesses. We're also working with the industries, including the airline industries, the cruise ship industry, which, obviously, will be hit. We're working with them very, very strongly. We want them to travel. We want people to travel to certain locations and not to other locations at this moment. And hopefully, that will straighten out sooner rather than later. But we're working with the industries and in particular those two industries.

We're also talking to the hotel industry. And some places, actually, will do well, and some places probably won't do well at all. But we're working also with the hotel industry.

But the main thing is that we're taking care of the American public, and we will be taking care of the American public.

And I really appreciate the professionals behind me and the professionals actually behind them, in a different room. We have a tremendous team, and it's headed up by our great Vice President, Mike Pence. And I want to thank Mike because he's been working 24 hours a day, just about. He has been working very, very hard, very diligently, and very professionally. And I want to thank him; I want to thank the team. And I'll have Mike say a few words.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

Mike, please.

Vice President Michael R. Pence. Thank you, Mr. President. We just completed the day's meeting of the White House Coronavirus Task Force. We were—had the opportunity to brief the President today on a broad range of issues.

And once again, because of the unprecedented action that President Trump took in January—suspending all travel from China, establishing travel advisories for portions of South Korea and Italy, establishing screening of all direct flights, all passengers from all airports Italy and South Korea—we have bought a considerable amount of time, according to all the health experts, to deal with the coronavirus here in the United States.

In fact, as I stand before you today, the risk of contracting the coronavirus to the American public remains low, and the risk of serious disease among the American public also remains low.

That being said, the President did deploy not just a whole-of-Government approach, but also a whole-of-America approach. And last week, at the President's direction, we met with leaders in industries, from nursing homes to airlines, pharmaceutical companies, commercial labs, and it's had great, great impact.

Pharmaceutical companies are already working, literally around the clock, on the development of therapeutics that will be medicines that can bring relief to people that contract the coronavirus. And I know that—how pleased the President was to learn that the commercial labs in this country, led by companies like LabCorp and Quest, have already brought a test forward and are taking that to market effective today.

This week, at the President's direction, we'll be meeting with hospital CEOs, health insurance CEOs, and all—building on top of what the President will be announcing tomorrow with regard to economic relief for working Americans.

We also met today in a conference call with 47 of America's Governors. We were able to brief them on the latest, the progress that we've made. We were able to confirm with them that testing is now available in all State labs in every State in the country. Over a million tests have been distributed. Before the end of this week, another 4 million tests will be distributed. But as I said before, with the deployment of the commercial labs, we literally are going to see a dramatic increase in the available—availability of testing, and that's all a direct result of the President's leadership.

Today, in a few moments, we will outline community guidance that Dr. Birx and Dr. Fauci will be publishing. At the President's direction, we're going to be providing guidance about how to keep your home safe, how to keep your business safe, how to keep safe and healthy at your school. And we'll be publishing that information and speaking about that.

A brief word about the *Grand Princess*: The *Grand Princess* has docked this afternoon in Oakland, California, at a commercial dock. Twenty-five children, we were happy to learn through the screening over the last 2 days—the 25 children on the ship are all healthy. Of the people that have contracted the coronavirus—21 in all—they're being dealt with in proper isolation.

Working with health authorities in California, we hope before the end of today to begin to disembark California residents to Travis Air Force Base in Miramar. We've made arrangements with Canada and the U.K. to take their passengers back. They'll be transported directly to the tarmac, charter flights home. And tomorrow the remaining passengers will be transported, again, through very, very carefully controlled environments: buses out to the tarmac and flown to military bases in Georgia and Texas.

All the passengers will be tested, isolated as appropriate, quarantined as appropriate. And I want to express appreciation to the Governor of California and his administration, the Governor of Georgia, the Governor of Texas, for their strong cooperation with us in resolving the issues around the *Grand Princess*. It has been a partnership which the President directed us from the very beginning. And the process that Bob Kadlec will detail, and any questions, in a few moments, continues to work and move forward.

The remaining people on the ship, the crew itself, will push off from the dock, and they will be quarantined and observed and treated shipboard. But the President made the priority to get the Americans ashore, and we're in the process of doing that, as well as returning the foreign nationals.

Let me just say one other point: As the President has spoken today to congressional leadership, one of the things that I informed the President that I have been hearing from Governors is the concern about hourly wage earners in this country feeling that they had to go to work, even if they were ill. And the President has tasked this economic team, and is working already with leaders in the Congress, to make sure that anyone is not—feels that they're at risk of losing their job or losing a paycheck because they may contract the coronavirus.

When we tell people, "If you're sick, stay home," the President has tasked the team with developing economic policies that will make it very, very clear that we're going to stand by those hardworking Americans, stand by those businesses large and small, and make it possible for us, as the President said from the very beginning, to put the health of America first.

We'll be available to take any questions on any of these topics, but, Mr. President, I didn't know if you wanted to speak a few more, in closing.

The President. Well, I think what we will be doing is having a news conference tomorrow to talk about various things that we're doing economically—they'll be very major—including, obviously, the payroll tax cut.

And so we'll be meeting again tomorrow afternoon. We'll be coming back from the Senate, and we have a lot of very important meetings set up. And we'll have a press conference sometime after that, and we'll explain what we're doing on an economic standpoint and from an economic standpoint. But they will be very dramatic. And we have a great economy, we have a very strong economy, but this came—this blindsided the world. And I think we've handled it very, very well. I think they've done a great job. The people behind me have done a great job.

So I will be here tomorrow afternoon to let you know about some of the economic steps we're taking, which will be major. Thank you very much.

[At this point, the President left the briefing room.]

Q. Mr. President, have you been tested? Mr. President, have you been tested, sir?

Q. Mr. President, have you been tested?

Vice President Pence. Thank you, Mr. President.

Q. Has he been tested?

Q. Has he been tested?

Q. Have you been tested?

Vice President Pence. I have not been tested for the coronavirus.

Q. Has the President? Has the President been tested?

Q. Sir, he's been in contact with people who were in proximity to somebody who had the virus.

Vice President Pence. Let me be sure and get you an answer to that. I honestly don't know the answer to the question, but we'll refer that question, and we will get you an answer from the White House Physician very quickly.

Let me ask Dr. Fauci and Dr. Birx to come to the podium. You all, and the American public, will have at their fingertips, very quickly, guidance that this is for every American.

We're working with communities, like the Seattle area, like portions of California, New York, and Florida, that have what we call "community spread," a concentration of coronavirus

cases. But we directed our team to come up with helpful recommendations for every American, every American family, every American business and school.

And if Dr. Birx and Dr. Fauci step forward, they can outline that for you.

[The press briefing continued.]

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:34 p.m. in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Senate Majority Leader A. Mitchell McConnell. Vice President Pence referred to White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator Deborah L. Birx; National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Anthony S. Fauci; Gov. Gavin C. Newsom of California; Gov. Brian P. Kemp of Georgia; Gov. Gregory W. Abbott of Texas; and Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services for Preparedness and Response Robert Kadlec; and Physician to the President Sean P. Conley. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary included the entire briefing.

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